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Compiled: 2026-09-29

Contents

Majjhima Nikāya 2 Sabbāsavasutta: All the Outflows **1**

Going Through Dukkha **6**

Majjhima Nikāya 2 Sabbāsavasutta: All the Outflows

Āsavas and the Furnace of Patient Edurance
by Thaniyo Bhikkhu

Etymology:Āsava The word is formed from the combination of two parts:

- **ā-**: A prefix meaning "towards," "upon," or "all over."
- **-sava**: Derived from the Sanskrit root **√sru**, which means "to flow," "to trickle," or "to ooze."

Literal Meanings:

A. The "Outflow" or "Leak"
In this sense, *āsava* refers to something that leaks out of a container or into a vessel.

B. The "Ferment" or "Ooze"
In ancient India, *āsava* was the word for a spirituous liquor, a "ferment," or an "intoxicant" created by the long-standing discharge from trees or plants.

Thus have I heard—
One time the Buddha was dwelling at Sāvatthī in Jeta's Grove, Anāthapiṇḍika's park. There the Buddha addressed the bhikkhus: "Bhikkhus."
"Venerable sir," the bhikkhus replied to the Buddha. The Buddha said this:

"I will teach you the explanation on the restraint of all outflows. Listen and pay close attention, I will speak."
"Yes, venerable sir," the bhikkhus replied to the Buddha. The Buddha said this:

"I state that the destruction of the outflows is for one who knows and sees, not for one who does not know and does not see. And for one knowing and seeing what do I state the destruction of the outflows? Both yoniso manasikāra and ayoniso manasikāra. For one practicing ayoniso manasikāra, unarisen outflows arise and arisen outflows increase. But for one practicing yoniso manasikāra, unarisen outflows do not arise and arisen outflows are abandoned.

There are outflows to be abandoned by seeing, outflows to be abandoned by restraint, outflows to be abandoned by using, outflows to be abandoned by bearing , outflows to be abandoned by avoidance, outflows to be abandoned by removal, and outflows to be abandoned by bhāvanā.

1. Outflows to be Abandoned by Seeing

What are the outflows to be abandoned by seeing? Here, an untaught ordinary person—who is not a seer of the Noble Ones, is unskilled in the Noble dhammā, and is undisciplined in the Noble dhammā; who is not a seer of good persons, is unskilled in the dhammā of good persons, and is undisciplined in the dhammā of good persons—does not understand which dhammā should be given manasikāra and which dhammā should not be given manasikāra. Not understanding this, he gives manasikāra to dhammā that should not be given manasikāra, and he does not give manasikāra to dhammā that should be given manasikāra.

What are the dhammā that should not be given manasikāra but to which he gives manasikāra? They are the dhammā that, when given manasikāra, cause the unarisen outflow of sensuality to arise or the arisen outflow of sensuality to increase; cause the unarisen outflow of being (bhava) to arise or the arisen outflow of being to increase; and cause the unarisen outflow of avijjā to arise or the arisen outflow of avijjā to increase.

What are the dhammā that should be given manasikāra but to which he does not give manasikāra? They are the dhammā that, when given manasikāra, cause the unarisen outflow of sensuality not to arise or the arisen outflow of sensuality to be abandoned; cause the unarisen outflow of being not to arise or the arisen outflow of being to be abandoned; and cause the unarisen outflow of avijjā not to arise or the arisen outflow of avijjā to be abandoned.

Because he gives manasikāra to dhammā that should not be given manasikāra and fails to give manasikāra to dhammā that should be given manasikāra, unarisen outflows arise in him and arisen outflows increase.

He practices ayoniso manasikāra in this way: 'Was I in the past? Was I not in the past? What was I in the past? How was I in the past? Having been what, what did I become in the past? Will I be in the future? Will I not be in the future? What will I be in the future? How will I be in the future? Having been what, what will I become in the future?' Or he is internally doubtful about the present time: 'Am I? Am I not? What am I? How am I? Where has this being come from? Where will it go?'

When he practices ayoniso manasikāra in this way, one of six views arises in him. The view 'I have a self' arises in him as truth and reality; the view 'I have no self' arises in him as truth and reality; the view 'I perceive self by self' arises in him as truth and reality; the view 'I perceive non-self by self' arises in him as truth and reality; the view 'I perceive self by non-self' arises in him as truth and reality; or else he has the view: 'This self of mine that speaks and feels, and experiences the result of good and bad actions (kammas) here and there, this self is permanent, stable, eternal, not subject to change, and will remain exactly the same for eternity.'

This is called a thicket of views, a wilderness of views, a contortion of views, a vacillation of views, a fetter of views. Fettered by the fetter of views, the untaught ordinary person is not fully freed from birth, aging, death, sorrows, lamentations, dukkhas, mental displeasures, and despairs; I state that 'he is not fully freed from dukkha'.

But a well-taught ariyasāvako—who is a seer of the Noble Ones, is skilled in the Noble dhammā, and is well-disciplined in the Noble dhammā; who is a seer of good persons, is skilled in the dhammā of good persons, and is well-disciplined in the dhammā of good persons—understands which dhammā should be given manasikāra and which dhammā should not be given manasikāra. Understanding this, he does not give manasikāra to dhammā that should not be given manasikāra, and he gives manasikāra to dhammā that should be given manasikāra.

What are the dhammā that should not be given manasikāra and to which he does not give manasikāra? They are the dhammā that, when given manasikāra, cause the unarisen outflow of sensuality to arise or the arisen outflow of sensuality to increase; cause the unarisen outflow of being to arise or the arisen outflow of being to increase; and cause the unarisen outflow of avijjā to arise or the arisen outflow of avijjā to increase.

What are the dhammā that should be given manasikāra and to which he gives manasikāra? They are the dhammā that, when given manasikāra, cause the unarisen outflow of sensuality not to arise or the arisen outflow of sensuality to be abandoned; cause the unarisen outflow of being not to arise or the arisen outflow of being to be abandoned; and cause the unarisen outflow of avijjā not to arise or the arisen outflow of avijjā to be abandoned.

Because he does not give manasikāra to dhammā that should not be given manasikāra and gives manasikāra to dhammā that should be given manasikāra, unarisen outflows do not arise in him and arisen outflows are abandoned.

He practices yoniso manasikāra in this way: 'This is dukkha'; he practices yoniso manasikāra: 'This is the origin of dukkha'; he practices yoniso manasikāra: 'This is the cessation of dukkha'; he practices yoniso manasikāra: 'This is the path leading to the cessation of dukkha'.

When he practices yoniso manasikāra in this way, three fetters are abandoned: identity view, doubt, and sīlabbataparāmāsa. These are called the outflows to be abandoned by seeing.

2. Outflows to be Abandoned by Restraint

What are the outflows to be abandoned by restraint? Here, by reflecting yoniso, a bhikkhu dwells restrained with the restraint of the eye faculty. If he were to dwell unrestrained with the restraint of the eye faculty, outflows, vexations, and fevers would arise in him; but when he dwells restrained with the restraint of the eye faculty, those outflows, vexations, and fevers do not arise.

By reflecting yoniso, he dwells restrained with the restraint of the ear faculty… the nose faculty… the tongue faculty… the physical body (kāya) faculty… the mano faculty. If he were to dwell unrestrained with the restraint of the mano faculty, outflows, vexations, and fevers would arise in him; but when he dwells restrained with the restraint of the mano faculty, those outflows, vexations, and fevers do not arise.

If he were to dwell completely unrestrained, outflows, vexations, and fevers would arise in him; but when he dwells restrained, those outflows, vexations, and fevers do not arise. These are called the outflows to be abandoned by restraint.

3. Outflows to be Abandoned by Using

What are the outflows to be abandoned by using? Here, by reflecting yoniso, a bhikkhu uses the robe: 'Only to ward off cold, to ward off heat, to ward off contact with flies, mosquitoes, wind, sun, and creeping things, and only for the purpose of covering the private parts.'

By reflecting yoniso, he uses almsfood: 'Not for amusement, not for intoxication, not for beautification, not for adornment, but only for the continuation and nourishment of this physical body, for keeping away harm, and for the support of the brahmacariya, thinking: 'Thus I will destroy the old feeling and will not arouse a new feeling, and I will maintain myself, be blameless, and dwell comfortably.'

By reflecting yoniso, he uses lodging: 'Only to ward off cold, to ward off heat, to ward off contact with flies, mosquitoes, wind, sun, and creeping things, and only for the purpose of dispelling the dangers of weather and enjoying seclusion.'

By reflecting yoniso, he uses medicinal requisites for the sick: 'Only to ward off arisen sickness feelings, and for the highest benefit of freedom from affliction.'

[The Āgama parallel – MĀ 10 – elaborates the intentions for using requisites slightly differently: "If one uses clothing, it is not for the sake of material gain, pride, or adornment, but solely to ward off mosquitoes, gadflies, wind, rain, cold, and heat, and for the sake of shame and modesty. If one uses food and drink, it is not for gain, pride, or to become plump and attractive. It is solely to sustain the kāya for a long time, to remove afflictions and domanassa, to practice the brahmacariya, to ensure that old illnesses are severed and new illnesses do not arise, and to live long, securely, and free from disease. If one uses dwellings, rooms, beds, and bedding, it is not for gain, pride, or adornment, but solely to recover from fatigue and find a quiet place to sit. If one uses medical decoctions, it is not for gain, pride, or to become plump and attractive, but solely to eradicate the torments of illness, to sustain the life faculty, and to remain secure and free from disease."]

If he did not use these requisites with such "reflection", outflows, vexations, and fevers would arise in him; but when he uses them properly, those outflows, vexations, and fevers do not arise. These are called the outflows to be abandoned by using.

4. Outflows to be Abandoned by Bearing

What are the outflows to be abandoned by bearing ? Here, by reflecting yoniso, a bhikkhu is patient with cold, heat, hunger, and thirst. He becomes one of an enduring nature regarding contact with flies, mosquitoes, wind, sun, and creeping things; regarding ill-spoken and unwelcome ways of speech; and regarding arisen bodily feelings that are dukkha, sharp, severe, piercing, disagreeable, unpleasing, and life-taking.

[The **Āgama** parallel adds an entirely new section here on energetic bearing before listing physical hardships: "One exerts energy to abandon evil and unwholesome states and to cultivate wholesome dhammā, constantly maintaining the perception of striving. With a focused citta, they strive diligently. Even if the skin, flesh, sinews, bones, blood, and marrow of the kāya dry up, they do not abandon their energy until they have attained what they seek."] [The parallel also adds to the list of unpleasant experiences: "fleas, lice… abusive voices. Even if beaten with a stick, one can endure it."]

If he did not endure these things, outflows, vexations, and fevers would arise in him; but when he endures them, those outflows, vexations, and fevers do not arise. These are called the outflows to be abandoned by bearing .

5. Outflows to be Abandoned by Avoidance

What are the outflows to be abandoned by avoidance? Here, by reflecting yoniso, a bhikkhu avoids a fierce elephant, a fierce horse, a fierce bull, a fierce dog, a snake, a stump, a thorny place, a chasm, a cliff, a cesspool, and a sewer. By reflecting yoniso, he avoids sitting in unsuitable seats, wandering in unsuitable resorts, and associating with bad friends, since wise fellow-followers of the brahmacariya would suspect him of bad conduct if he did so.

If he did not avoid these things, outflows, vexations, and fevers would arise in him; but when he avoids them, those outflows, vexations, and fevers do not arise. These are called the outflows to be abandoned by avoidance.

6. Outflows to be Abandoned by Removal

What are the outflows to be abandoned by removal? Here, by reflecting yoniso, a bhikkhu does not consent to an arisen vitakka of sensuality; he abandons it, removes it, terminates it, and makes it non-existent. He does not consent to an arisen vitakka of ill-will… an arisen vitakka of harming… any continually arising bad, unwholesome dhammā; he abandons them, removes them, terminates them, and makes them non-existent.

If he did not remove these things, outflows, vexations, and fevers would arise in him; but when he removes them, those outflows, vexations, and fevers do not arise. These are called the outflows to be abandoned by removal.

7. Outflows to be Abandoned by Bhāvanā

What are the outflows to be abandoned by bhāvanā? Here, by reflecting yoniso, a bhikkhu engages in the bhāvanā of the sati-enlightenment factor, supported by viveka, supported by dispassion, supported by cessation, culminating in relinquishment.

By reflecting yoniso, he engages in the bhāvanā of the investigation-of-dhammā-enlightenment factor… the effort-enlightenment factor… the joy-enlightenment factor… the calming-enlightenment factor… the samādhi-enlightenment factor… the upekkhā-enlightenment factor, supported by viveka, supported by dispassion, supported by cessation, culminating in relinquishment.

If he did not engage in their bhāvanā, outflows, vexations, and fevers would arise in him; but when he engages in their bhāvanā, those outflows, vexations, and fevers do not arise. These are called the outflows to be abandoned by bhāvanā.

Conclusion

When, for a bhikkhu, the outflows to be abandoned by seeing are abandoned by seeing; the outflows to be abandoned by restraint are abandoned by restraint; the outflows to be abandoned by using are abandoned by using; the outflows to be abandoned by bearing are abandoned by bearing ; the outflows to be abandoned by avoidance are abandoned by avoidance; the outflows to be abandoned by removal are abandoned

by removal; and the outflows to be abandoned by bhāvanā are abandoned by bhāvanā—this is called: 'A bhikkhu who dwells restrained with the restraint of all outflows. He has severed craving, turned away the fetter, and, rightly by the breakthrough of conceit, has made an end of dukkha.'"

This the Buddha said. Satisfied, those bhikkhus rejoiced in the Buddha's speech.

"Patient endurance is the supreme austerity." – Dhammapada 184

You are born into three underlying pressures outflowing from the citta and flooding experience: the urge towards sensual pleasures (kamāsava), the urge towards being (bhavāsava), and the urge towards denial and distraction (avijjāsava). These habitual, structural attitudes of the citta are not only states of agitation, but they also determine a severe narrowing of attention. The agitated citta focuses entirely on obtaining pleasure, blinding itself to the dangers of doing so. It operates from a self-centered position, demanding its own point of view be prioritized, and denies, unknowingly, any truths that undermine its sensual way of being. It enforces a way of seeing that is willfully blind to the greater context of your existential situation.

The strained citta's craving pressures you to seek relief in sense pleasures, demanding a moment of rest which comes only after much toil – a pleasure born entirely from exhaustion by being enslaved to an unexhausted craving. The citta seeks to control a world that is fundamentally uncontrollable. It pushes and obsesses over a persistent "self" narrative: "Who am I? How am I? Why am I? What was I? What will I be? How is this in relation to me?" It consistently leans toward whatever is immediately pleasant and generates a deep resistance to anything that reveals the nature of uncertainty – anicca. These modes of being keep you bound in an infinite struggle against the Nature of Things (Dhamma). This is fundamentally dukkha born of *trying* to escape dukkha, instead of no longer resisting it.

To counter these tendencies, you must see through the dukkha, the pressure, the craving, and the intentions that the citta habitually presents, and refuse to take them up. This is Yonisomanasikara – a context-knowing awareness that cuts through the habitual, narrowed attention of the citta. You execute this by forcing Right View upon the citta: the recognition that the root of the dukkha is craving and nothing else. Turn your attention directly to that background craving agitation and see its nature as suffering. This gives the citta the necessary space to understand and then relax that craving. This requires relentless remembering on your part to see through to what is important, because the citta will not do it for you. Right View must be forced upon the citta. It will resist.

Sense restraint is an essential component in this seemingly hostile takeover of the citta. You specifically must restrain yourself, because if you do not, the citta certainly will not. This restraint makes the workings of suffering clear by outlining the pressure of the senses, the craving, the dukkha, and the various conditions that make up experience. This observation goes a long way in undermining the citta's assumption of an unconditioned, independent self-identity. This dynamic will not be obvious if you are not looking for it, but what will be undeniable is the coolness of restraint. To extract wisdom from that peace, you must keep the greater context and purpose alive through active self-reflection. It will not just happen on its own.

There is plenty to reflect on, because every act has an intention behind it which is either wholesome or unwholesome, connected with the goal or not. By knowing its flavor, you avoid the unwholesome and undermine every act that allows the wild citta to grow wilder. Trace every action back to its root intention. Expose the motivation. You will find that the actions you love most directly fuel your suffering.

Many motivations that you were previously unaware of, or that you were aware of but chose to ignore, will be brought to light. This is difficult to face and accept. You will want to keep those background motivations covered up, because by uncovering them, you are forced to come to terms with the very habits that sustain your dukkha.

Patient endurance is the core practice here. It is the refusal to move when craving demands movement. It is the friction that creates the fire to burn defilements. This factor must be protected against the citta's agitation no matter what.

Restraint starves the defilements; patient endurance shines a light upon them, leading to their eventual extinguishment. The citta must be forced into clarity until the pressure of craving breaks.

"Formerly this citta wandered about as it liked, where it wished and according to its pleasure, but now I shall thoroughly master it with wisdom, as a mahout controls an elephant in rut." – Dhammapada 326

Going Through Dukkha

- **by Thaniyo Thero**

If I experience a painful feeling in relation to a bodily sensation, such as a backache, should I then just leave that ache alone without trying to get rid of it, so that my craving and suffering diminish?

If your attitude behind your action is not one of craving, then you can do whatever it takes to heal the backache. Lay down, take an ibuprofen, etc.

Using medicines or trying to heal the body doesn't have to involve craving, but it will unless you know the Middle way (non-lust, non-aversion, non-distraction) to escape from craving.

Pain can be managed, but one must do so in such a way that uproots one's suffering (the starving of craving) rather than managing one's suffering (the feeding of craving).

By no longer acting out of craving, which you have been doing habitually since you can remember, you can begin to discern the nature of that attitude of craving, which does not disappear as soon as you decide to stop following it. As one becomes aware of craving, one becomes aware of suffering in all its gory details. It feels pretty intense and seems like it's going to last forever. No ibuprofen or physical relaxation is going to help with that suffering. The point is that you can manage your physical pain without feeding your suffering.

When you don't act out of craving, you will discover its true nature. You get to see the extent of *Dukkha*.

Now, any act of craving, no matter how small, will fuel that dukkha and keep you confined within it. Any management of that suffering will keep you liable to the management of suffering. The only escape lies in 'patient endurance'- the Middle way. In other words, the dukkha must be experienced without adding more fuel to its fire, and as long as the craving persists, it's going to burn.

Trying to find a way to manage that suffering is inevitable. Likewise with wanting to get rid of it. And if you manage not to do that, you will come face to face with dukkha, which will seem everlasting. The goal, however, is not to be moved by it, to no longer be affected even if it is the most severe suffering you can imagine, even if it feels like it will last forever. Dukkha must be overcome, and in order to do that, you have to adopt this 'middle way of non-craving' attitude.

This non-doing of craving is one of the hardest things to accomplish. Nevertheless, if you keep trying, you can eventually find the right balance and at that *point*, you must stay, until there is no longer a problem with dukkha. Which means it's no longer dukkha.